



# THIRD SECTOR LEEDS

## RESPONSE TO LEEDS' COVID PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS – LEARNING LESSONS

MAY 2021



## Context

Third Sector Leeds (TSL) is the leading policy body that advocates for the third sector's values and interests in supporting Leeds' *Best City* ambition. TSL has produced this response to Leeds City Council's review of Leeds' Covid Partnership Arrangements on behalf of the whole third sector. The Initial observations were shared at a meeting attended by 'Gold' third sector representatives and leaders from the city's main third sector infrastructure organisations (Voluntary Action Leeds and Forum Central).

Subsequently, these observations were tested and refined through consultation with third sector representatives from all 'Gold', 'Silver' and 'Bronze' groups and with the Community Care Hub and Communities of Interest networks.

## Positives

- The perception is that the emergency structures in Leeds have worked well and that this has contributed to an effective Leeds response
- Third Sector organisations have been well represented at every level of the emergency response structure – and this is in marked difference to reports from other cities
- Third Sector representatives have welcomed the responsive approach to the emergency – with, in particular, a more collaborative ('sector blind') approach to shaping services
- Third Sector representatives feel that the emergency response has cemented and strengthened relationships with public sector colleagues
- Third Sector representatives welcomed the speed of access to information and the quality of the information that became available to them
- The emergency response structures have led to significant positive impacts on communities and on the third sector including:
  - A responsive food distribution system
  - Detailed work on end of life care
  - Equality of access for the third sector to vaccinations (third sector representatives have reported that elsewhere in West Yorks the same equality of access has not been experienced)

## Learnings for the future

- Some contributors felt that there was a degree of duplication in the structures
  - It was not always clear why some areas of focus were designated 'Bronze' and some 'Silver'
  - It was not always clear what the decision making process, or line of reporting was
  - Although a 'map' of the emergency response structure was created, regularly updated and available publicly through Council Executive Board reports, some representatives were not aware of its existence. Whilst recognizing the significant communication challenges thrown up by Covid, it might have been possible to identify a package of core information that could be signposted to reps and to the wider sector.

- Some third sector reps felt that that it was not always clear which parts of the third sector were active in different parts of the system and that a single guide for where to turn to for help would strengthened the cities' response
- Some contributors felt that the influence of the third sector was most effective at the more operational 'Bronze' level and that the opportunity to influence overarching strategy was more limited
  - Contributors recognized that the third sector's diversity (its strength) can limit its ability to speak with one strategic voice (it lacks the single organization structure that public sector organisations have)
  - Some third sector respondents highlighted specific interventions that had been proposed (e.g. around providing volunteers to support testing) that had not been adopted
- Some contributors felt that there were barriers (in all sectors) to interpreting and communicating emerging strategy and its operational detail in a way that could be useful to the wider third sector in delivering services and mutual aid at ground level. One contributor said ***'What I needed was a single communication which said these are the things you really need to know this week'***
  - Innovations such as the Community of Interest network and the enabling communication structure for Community Care Hubs helped to sharpen communications.
  - Opening the Council's weekly core communication to Cllrs to third sector infrastructure enabled key messages to be selected and communicated through [Doing Good Leeds](#), and other channels.

*Note: In TSL's view it would have been impossible for any communication strategy through the pandemic to meet the needs of all organisations and communities. We believe the Council and its partners delivered well. The key challenge for partners to consider for the future is how messages can be curated and interpreted in a way that is useful to third sector organisations that are not directly linked into public sector systems.*

## **Recommendations for the next emergency**

- Partners could work together to signpost a package of key structural information for representatives in the emergency structure and the wider third sector
- Apply and explain a methodology for the establishment of 'Bronze', 'Silver' and 'Gold' groups enabling clearer lines of decision makers
- All partners could plan now for how the strategic voice of the third sector could be enhanced
- Public sector partners could work with infrastructure bodies to identify and address the particular communication needs of the wider third sector
- Infrastructure bodies could plan now for how they will collaborate to ensure clearer messaging to, and the involvement of, frontline third sector organisations

- Infrastructure bodies could work with public sector partners and national third sector organisations to develop clearer lines of communication around volunteering and the division of responsibility between local and national responses.

Third Sector Leeds is supported by Voluntary Action Leeds , Stringer House, 34 Lupton Street, Leeds LS10 2QW  
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